

Testimony IN SUPPORT of House Bill No. 6578 - An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process

March 10, 2021

Dear Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative Mastrofrancesco, and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

My name is Elyse Krantz, and I am a voter from Southington. Passing HB 6578 is important to me because it has the power to impact two major issues that affect our democracy: (1) the restoration of electoral privileges of convicted felons who are on parole, and (2) the codification of existing practices regarding voter registration procedures at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

When I first learned about HB 6578, I honestly wasn't sure how I felt about convicted felons on parole being granted the right to vote again. Part of me thought, "If they broke a law, why should they be permitted to cast a ballot now?" But the more I wrestled with the issue, the clearer the answer became. **These individuals are on parole because a parole board determined these individuals have reformed and no longer pose a threat to society.** They should be released from their prison sentence early and be reintegrated into our community as contributing members of society.

If these individuals do not have their right to vote reinstated, how can we expect them to embrace the notion that they should fully participate as good, ethical citizens of our community? Not only does preventing formerly incarcerated people from voting **undermine good-faith attempts at reintegration**, it also decreases the voting power of the communities in which people on parole reside.

While those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities, they are communities with significant populations of Black and Latino people. It is a historical fact that **felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after the Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and suppress Black political power.** While many residents of Connecticut do not wish to acknowledge the presence of laws and practices that support systemic racism in our state, I cannot stand by and allow this kind of inequality to persist.

If HB 6578 passes, Connecticut will not be alone in restoring the electoral privileges of convicted felons who are on parole. In fact, Connecticut is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Twenty states allow people on parole to vote and, just a few weeks ago, New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole. **Disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state**, and that is why I urge you to pass HB 6578.

The second aspect of the bill, that codifies the existing practice regarding voter registration procedures at the Department of Motor Vehicles, is an important first step. However, I strongly urge the Committee to **expand Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) to the Dept. of Social**

Services, HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities, and other state agencies.

In recent months, there has been a great deal of discussion about the honesty and integrity of our nation's elections. These concerns have only grown as the popularity and interest in no-excuse absentee ballots and early voting have also increased. Like others across the state, I too want to ensure our voter rolls are accurate and reflect the names of all individuals who are eligible to vote. **One of the easiest ways to assure voters and lawmakers that elections in Connecticut are organized and ethical is to update and modernize our voter rolls through AVR.**

After reviewing literature regarding other states' success with AVR, I have no doubt that expanding AVR in Connecticut will make great strides in improving the validity of our voter rolls. Studies show that AVR **enhances the security and integrity of elections by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registrations** through an automatic process. If lawmakers are concerned about inaccurate voter rolls impacting our election results, supporting an expanded version of AVR is a proven way to effectively **deliver the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns.**

AVR is also positive because it boosts civic participation. This is truly a bi-partisan issue that should be embraced by all lawmakers, regardless of personal politics. **A democracy isn't a democracy if it's only convenient for some members of society to register to vote.** By carefully automating the process, we can ensure that all eligible voters have access to a right that's granted by the U.S. Constitution and represents a fundamental part of our citizenship.

Not only will expanded AVR help to increase democratic participation, it will also save taxpayer money. Across the country, localities have **saved an average of \$3.54 in labor costs per registration** by moving from a paper to an electronic method.

According to a recent public opinion poll, **77% of Connecticut voters support Automatic Voter Registration**, a practice that's currently in place in 19 other states plus the District of Columbia. Because I firmly believe in safely and ethically expanding voter access to include all eligible voters, I urge you to pass HB 6578 **but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies.**

Thank you,

Elyse Krantz
Southington, CT